

HARPER'S Monthly Magazine

for December.
1909



The Salem Wolf.

by Howard Pyle.

I

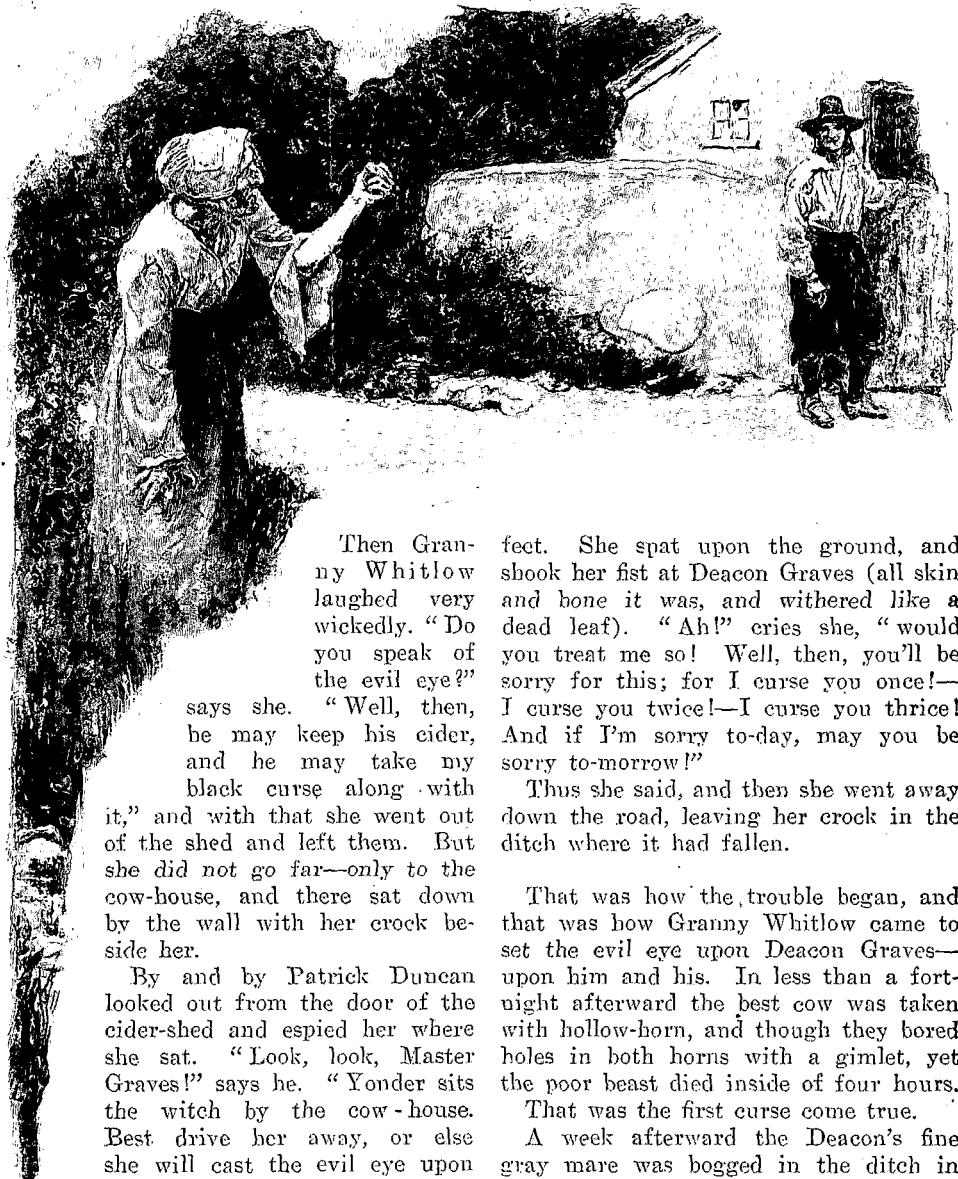
THESE things happened in the year when the witches were so malignant at Salem, and the trouble began over a crock of cider.

Deacon Graves and Je-rusha and little Ichabod and old Patrick Duncan were in the cider-shed at the time. Granny Whit-low came to the cider-press, bringing with her a great stoneware crock, and she begged for a crockful of cider.

That was in October before she was hanged for a witch, and she was already in ill odor with all God-fearing men and women. It was known by many that she had an evil eye, and that her malignant soul was as black as a coal and fit for nothing but hell-fire.

Deacon Graves was a stanch professor, and an upright believer in the gospel. "You'll get no cider here," says he. "Begone!" says he, "for I am a friend of God, and you are a friend of the devil."

Then up spoke old Patrick Duncan. He was born in Scotland and had fought in Poland with Douglas under King Karl Gustav of Sweden. It is known that the Scotch and Polish witches and warlocks are the worst in the world, and Patrick Duncan knew more about them and their ways than you could find in a book. "Master," says he, "you had best give her the cider, or else she'll maybe cast the evil eye on the whole pressing."



Then Granny Whitlow laughed very wickedly. "Do you speak of the evil eye?" says she. "Well, then, he may keep his cider, and he may take my black curse along with it," and with that she went out of the shed and left them. But she did not go far—only to the cow-house, and there sat down by the wall with her crock beside her.

By and by Patrick Duncan looked out from the door of the cider-shed and espied her where she sat. "Look, look, Master Graves!" says he. "Yonder sits the witch by the cow-house. Best drive her away, or else she will cast the evil eye upon the cattle."

So Deacon Graves went out to where Granny Whitlow sat and caught her by the arm, and lifted her to her feet, and says he: "Get you gone, witch! What mischief are you brewing here? Get you gone, I say!" Therewith, still holding her tight by the arm, he haled her down to the gate and thrust her out into the road. As he thrust her out she stumbled and fell, and her crock rolled into the ditch beside the road.

But she scrambled very quickly up from the dusty road, and so got to her

feet. She spat upon the ground, and shook her fist at Deacon Graves (all skin and bone it was, and withered like a dead leaf). "Ah!" cries she, "would you treat me so! Well, then, you'll be sorry for this; for I curse you once!—I curse you twice!—I curse you thrice! And if I'm sorry to-day, may you be sorry to-morrow!"

Thus she said, and then she went away down the road, leaving her crock in the ditch where it had fallen.

That was how the trouble began, and that was how Granny Whitlow came to set the evil eye upon Deacon Graves—upon him and his. In less than a fortnight afterward the best cow was taken with hollow-horn, and though they bored holes in both horns with a gimlet, yet the poor beast died inside of four hours.

That was the first curse come true.

A week afterward the Deacon's fine gray mare was bogged in the ditch in the lower pasture, and sprung her shoulder so that she was never good for anything afterward.

That was the second curse come true.

But the third curse was bitter and black to the very bottom.

II

Deacon Graves had a daughter named Miriam. When she fell sick no one knew what ailed her. She grew very strange and wild, and if anybody asked her what ailed her she would maybe scream out, or fall to weeping, or else

she would fall into a furious rage, as though seized with a phrensy.

She was a likely girl, with eyes as black as sloes, and black hair, and black eyebrows, and red cheeks, and red lips, and teeth as white as those of a dog. She was promised to Abijah Butler, the son of Aaron Butler the cordwainer, and he came up from town twice or thrice a week to court her.

He saw, as everybody else saw, that she was not as she had been, but was grown very strange and wild. For a while he kept his thoughts to himself, but at last things grew so dark that he spoke very plainly to the girl's father and mother about the matter. "Tis my belief," says he, "that Granny Whitlow has bewitched her." And neither Deacon Graves nor Dame Graves could find any word to deny what he said.

One Sabbath day Abijah came out from town in the afternoon, and Miriam was in bed. Nothing seemed to ail her, but she would not get up out of bed, but lay there all day, staring at the ceiling and saying nothing. Then Abijah stood up, and he said: "It is high time to do something about this business. If I am to marry Miriam, I must first know what it is ails her."

Dame Graves says: "We none of us know what ails her. We've given her mustard, and sulphur, and boneset, and nothing does her any good."

"Well," says Abijah Butler, "what I said stays where I stuck it. Unless I know what is the matter with Miriam, all is off between us, and I am away."

So Abijah Butler, and Deacon Graves, and Dame Graves, and Patrick Duncan, all four, went to the room where Miriam lay. There she was lying in bed and still as a log; but the moment they set



foot in the room she cried out very loud and shrill, and snatched the coverlet over her head. Then she fell to shrieking and screaming as though she had gone mad, bidding them go away and let her lie in peace.

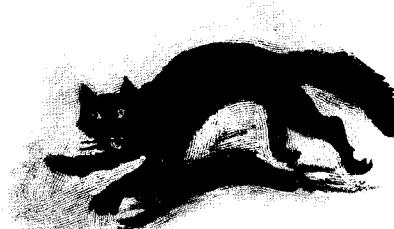
Deacon Graves went to the bedside and caught her very tight by the arm. "Be still!" says he. "Be still, or I will whip you!" and therewith she immediately fell silent, and lay trembling like any leaf.

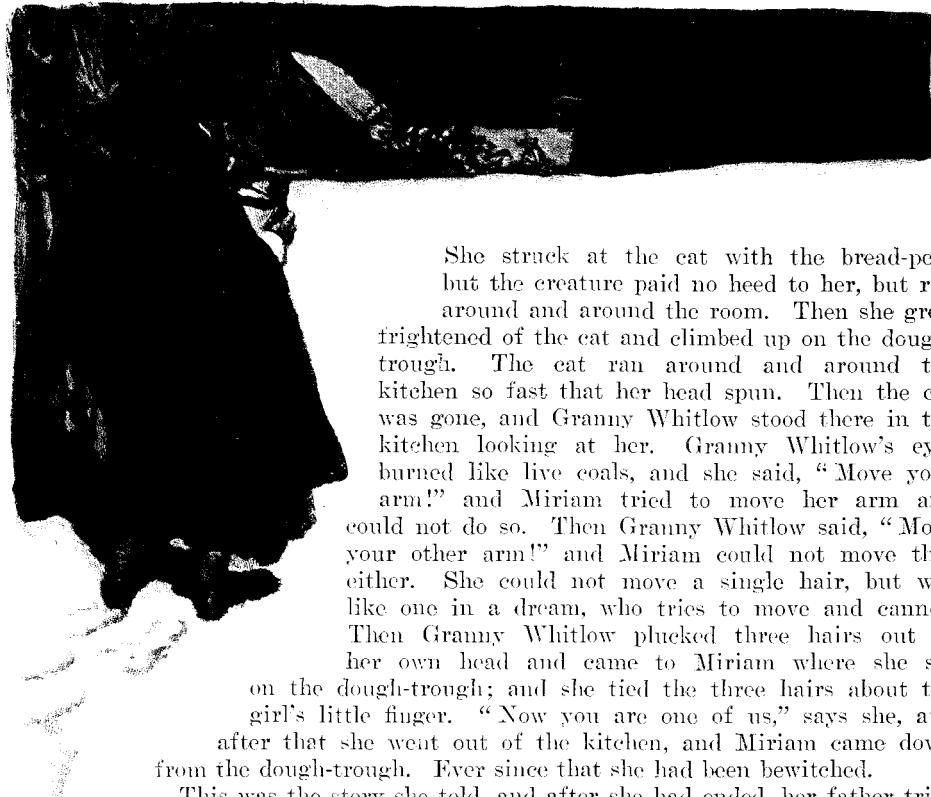
Then Deacon Graves, still holding her tight by the arm, says to her, "What ails you?" And she said, speaking very weak and faint from under the bed coverlet, "Nothing ails me." Says he, "Tell me, are you bewitched?" and to that she said nothing. Then he says, "Tell me who has bewitched you?" but still she would say nothing. He says, "Tell me who has bewitched you, or I will whip you."

At that she began crying under the coverlet, but still she would not say anything. Then Deacon Graves says, "Tell me, was it Granny Whitlow who bewitched you?" and at that she said "Yes."

After that they got the whole story from her by piecemeal. This was what she told them:

One day she was turning the bread in the oven. The kitchen door was open, and a great black cat came running in.





She struck at the cat with the bread-peel, but the creature paid no heed to her, but ran around and around the room. Then she grew frightened of the cat and climbed up on the dough-trough. The cat ran around and around the kitchen so fast that her head spun. Then the cat was gone, and Granny Whitlow stood there in the kitchen looking at her. Grannny Whitlow's eyes burned like live coals, and she said, "Move your arm!" and Miriam tried to move her arm and could not do so. Then Granny Whitlow said, "Move your other arm!" and Miriam could not move that either. She could not move a single hair, but was like one in a dream, who tries to move and cannot. Then Granny Whitlow plucked three hairs out of her own head and came to Miriam where she sat on the dough-trough; and she tied the three hairs about the girl's little finger. "Now you are one of us," says she, and after that she went out of the kitchen, and Miriam came down from the dough-trough. Ever since that she had been bewitched.

This was the story she told, and after she had ended, her father tried to say something to her. At first he could not say anything, but could only swallow and swallow as though a nut stuck in his throat. Then at last he says—speaking in a voice as dry as a husk, "Tell me, have you ever been to the Devil's Meeting House?"

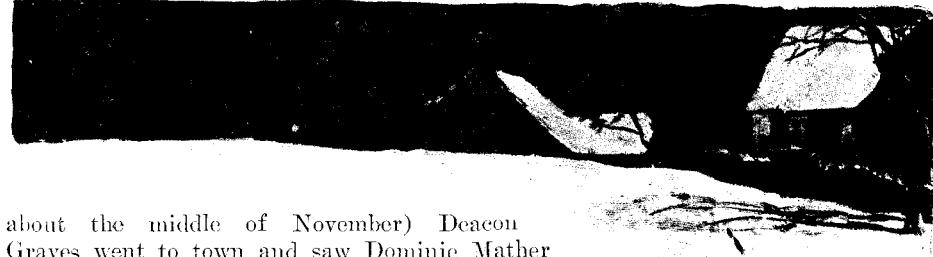
At that Miriam began to cry out very loud from under the coverlet. Deacon Graves says, "Tell me the truth, or I will whip you!" Thereupon Miriam from under the coverlet said, "Yes—once or twice." He says, "Who took you?" and she says, "It was Granny Whitlow took me."

Then Deacon Graves says, "Let me see your hand." And the girl reached her hand out from under the coverlet. They all looked, and, lo! there was a ring of hair tied about her little finger.

Dame Graves took a pair of scissors and cut the hairs, and after that they all went out of the room and left her. They sat for a while together in the kitchen, and were more happy than they had been for a long time, for they all thought that now that the hair ring was cut from her finger Miriam would be herself again.

By and by, Abijah Butler went home, and after he had gone, Dame Graves says to the Deacon: "You should not have asked Miriam about going to the Devil's Meeting House, and that before Abijah Butler. Who knows what he thinks! He might never come back again, and then where would we find another husband for the girl?" But Abijah Butler was wonderfully in love with Miriam, and even this, and worse than this, did not drive him away from her.

After that time, Miriam Graves was better for two or three days; then she became once more as wild as ever. By this they all knew either that the witchcraft had struck into her bones so that she could not rid herself of it, or else that she had been bewitched again. So a week or so after that (it was then



about the middle of November) Deacon Graves went to town and saw Dominie Mather and told him the whole story from beginning to end, just as it was and without hiding anything.

When Grauny Whitlow was tried for witchcraft, a great many things were testified against her that had never been known before.

A little girl named Ann Greenfield testified that she had one time been down in Bedloe's Swamp, and that she had there seen Granny Whitlow sitting at the root of a tree, stark and stiff as though she were dead. Little Ann said that she was very much afraid, but she did not run away. She said that she stood and looked at Granny Whitlow, and by and by she saw something that came running very fast. It looked like a mouse running very fast among the leaves. She said it ran to Granny Whitlow, and ran up her breast and into her mouth, and then Granny Whitlow came to life again and opened her eyes. The little girl said that Granny Whitlow did not see her, but rose and went somewhere into the swamp.

Another girl, named Mercy Nailor, testified that she had once seen Grauny Whitlow riding across Fielding's Clearing in the dusk seated astride of a goat as black as coal. Mercy Nailor afterward withdrew her testimony, and confessed that it was not true. But Ann Greenfield's testimony was true, and several other things that were testified were true, for they were never withdrawn.

Deacon Graves was in the crowd when Granny Whitlow rode to the gallows in the hangman's cart. She saw him where he stood, and called out to him from the cart. "Ah, Deacon!" says she, "is that you? And so you have come to see me hanged, have you? Well, then, look to yourself; the third curse is still on you, and something worse than hanging will happen to you before the year is out."

Shortly after that she was hanged.

They all thought that, now Granny Whitlow was hanged, Miriam would be released from the witchcraft that tormented her, but she was not. Things went from bad to worse with her, for, by and by, they found that she would run away at night, no one knew whither. They set a watch upon her, but if they did but wink two or three times, lo! she would be gone.

God knows whither she went, but every time she ran away she would come back betwixt midnight and morning, all wild of face, but weak and wan as though she had ridden long and far. And always after such a time she would go straight to bed, and sleep, maybe, for a day and a night. Then she would wake and crave for something to eat, and when food was set before her she would eat, and eat, and eat like a wild creature that was starving.

III

Early in the winter the Salem wolf appeared at that place. Such a thing as a wolf had not been seen at Salem for thirty years and more, and folks



were slow to believe that it really was a wolf that killed the sheep or the young cattle or the swine that every now and then were found dead and part eaten in the morning.

But afterward everybody knew that it was a wolf; for one bright moonlight night Eli Hackett saw it as he was coming home from town meeting. A thin snow had fallen, and the night was wonderfully cold and clear and bright. Eli Hackett saw the wolf as plain as though it had been daylight. It ran across the corner of an open lot, and so back of the rope-walk. It appeared to be chasing something, and paid no heed to him, but ran straight on. And then he saw it again when it came out from behind the rope-walk — it ran across Widow Calder's garden-patch, and so into the clearing beyond.

After that several others saw the wolf at different times, and once it chased Doctor Wilkinson on a dark night for above a half-mile, and into the very town itself. Then so many people saw the wolf that women and children were afraid to go out after nightfall, and even men would not go out without an axe or a club, or maybe a pistol in the belt. The wolf haunted the town for above a month, and a great many pigs and sheep and several calves were killed in that time.

Old Patrick Duncan and little Ichabod Graves slept together in the same bed in the attic. One night Patrick Duncan awoke, and found that little Ichabod was shaking his shoulder, and shaking it and shaking it.

Says Patrick Duncan: "What is it, child? What ails you?"

"Oh! Patrick Duncan," says the little boy. "Wake up! There is a great beast running about in the yard!"

"What is it you say?" says Patrick Duncan. "A great beast? Pooh! pooh! child; you have been dreaming. Go to sleep again."



"Oh, Patrick Duncan!" says the little boy. "Wake up, for I am not dreaming! There is indeed a great beast out in the yard. For first I heard it, and then I looked out of the window and saw it with my very eyes, and it is there running about in the moonlight."

Then Patrick Duncan got up and went to the window of the attic and looked out, and there he saw that what little Ichabod had said was true. For there was the wolf, and it was running around and around the yard in the snow, and he could see it in the moonlight as plainly as though it were upon a sheet of white paper.

The wolf ran around and around in a circle as though it were at play, and every now and then it would snap up a mouthful of snow and cast it into the air. And every now and then it would run its muzzle into the snow and plough through the crust as though in playful sport.

Patrick Duncan said, "Is the musket in the kitchen loaded?" And little Ichabod said: "Yes; for I saw father load it and prime it fresh a week ago come Sabbath evening. For there was fresh talk of the wolf just then." "Then bide you here," says Patrick Duncan, "and I'll go fetch it." So by and by he came, bringing the musket from the kitchen.

There was a broken pane in the attic window and an old stocking in the broken place. Patrick Duncan drew out the stocking very softly, and all the while the great beast played around and around in the snow in the yard below. Patrick Duncan put the musket out through the broken place in the window pane. He took long aim and then he fired. The musket bellowed like thunder, and the air was all full of gunpowder smoke. Patrick Duncan felt sure that he had killed the wolf, but when the gunpowder smoke cleared away, there lay the yard as bare and as empty as the palm of the hand.

The whole house was awakened by the sound of the musket. They all came into the kitchen, except Miriam, who did not come out of her room. They stood about the hearth listening to what Patrick Duncan and little Ichabod had to tell them about the wolf. Patrick Duncan said: "I took a sure and certain aim, and I don't see how I could have missed my shot. I could see the sight of the gun as plain as daylight, and it was pointed straight at the heart of the beast."

As they stood there talking about it all, the kitchen door opened of a sudden very softly and quietly. For a moment it stood ajar, and then some one came into the house as still as a ghost. It was Miriam, and she was clad only in her shift and petticoat. They all looked at her as though they had been turned to stone, but she did not appear to see them. She went straight across the kitchen and to her room, and they could hear the bedstead squeak as she got into bed.

Then Dame Graves began crying. "Alas!" says she, "Miriam walks in her sleep and we can't keep her abed. Suppose the wolf had caught her and killed her!"

The next day Miriam was churning in the kitchen. Patrick Duncan came in and found her there alone.

"I missed my aim last night, mistress," says he.

"So I hear tell," says she.

"I'll not miss it again," says he.



"Why not?" says she.

"Because," says he, "I am going to melt down this rix-dollar and cast it into a slug. I know this much," says he, "that sometimes a silver slug will go through a hide that will turn a lump of lead. So if ever you see the Salem wolf," says he, "just tell it that the next bullet I shoot at it will be made of silver."

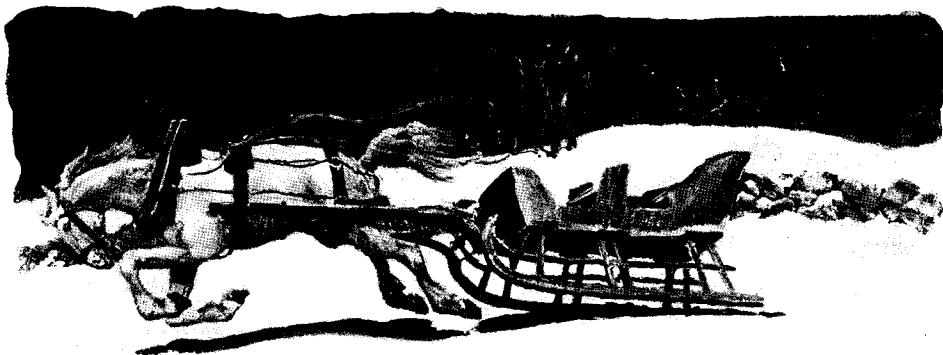
Then the girl stopped churning, and said, "What concern is all this to me?"

"Well," says Patrick Duncan, "you know better than I do whether it concerns you or not."

After that, and for a while, no more was heard of the Salem wolf. It was said that Patrick Duncan's musket-shot had frightened the beast away, but Patrick knew better than that. He knew that it was the threat of the silver bullet that had driven it off.

Then after a while the wolf came back again, and more people saw it, and more sheep and pigs and some calves were found dead in the morning. Then came the worst of all, for one morning Ezra Doolittle was found dead in his own back yard, and his neck was all torn and rent by the savage wild beast.

That was the first that any one sus-



pected that this was no ordinary wolf, but a man-wolf that was running loose among them.

IV

Late one afternoon Abijah Butler came out from town. Deacon Graves was not at home, and so he went down to the barn where Patrick Duncan was milking. "Patrick Duncan," says he, "tell me, what do you think ails Miriam Graves?"

Patrick Duncan's cheek was lying close against the belly of the cow as he milked, and he did not lift his head. "Why do you ask me?" says he. "Go ask her father and her mother what ails her."

Abijah Butler says, "Her father is not at home."

"Well," says Patrick Duncan, "go ask her mother."

"So I will," says Abijah Butler, "but I want you to come with me."

"Well," says Patrick Duncan, "I will go with you when I finish milking the cow."

So after Patrick Duncan had finished his milking they went together to the house, and Dame Graves sat alone in the kitchen at her spinning. Abijah Butler went to her and began speaking, but Patrick Duncan stood by the bench at the window, where he had set the milk pail.

"Tell me" says Abijah Butler, "what is it ails Miriam?"

Dame Graves put her hand to the wheel and stopped it. "You know what ails her as well as I do," says she, "for you heard what the girl said to her father."

"I heard what she said," says he, "but I fear me that worse even than witch-

craft ails her. There are things said about her," says he, "that I can't bear to hear; so if I am to be her husband," says he, "I must know what ails her, or else I must break with her."

Then Dame Graves began crying, and says she, "Don't you be hard with us, Abijah Butler; nothing ails the girl, only that she walks in her sleep, and dreams she is awake."

Abijah Butler says, "Where is Miriam now?"

At that Dame Graves flung her apron over her head, and cried out: "God knows where she is! She ran away half an hour ago!"

After that nobody spoke for a little while; then Abijah Butler says, "Where is Deacon Graves?" And Dame Graves said, "He went to town with a load of potatoes; he'll be back by now, or in a little while."

Abijah Butler says, "Well, I'll wait for him."

Then up spoke old Patrick Duncan. "Best not wait till the night comes down," said he, "for the wolf will be out to-night."

Abijah Butler laughed, and he turned back his overcoat and showed that he had his axe hanging at his belt. He clapped his hand to the shining head of his axe, and, says he: "How now! Need I be afraid?"

Just then Patrick Duncan said of a sudden: "Yonder comes the sledge! Now you can talk to Deacon Graves himself." Then in a moment he cries out: "How is this! The sledge is empty and the horse is running away!"

Thereafter, in a moment or two, the horse came running through the gate

with the sledge behind it, and the sledge was empty and swung from this side to that. Thus the horse ran past the house with the empty sledge behind it, and so down to the barn. Abijah Butler and Patrick Duncan ran out of the house and down to the barnyard, and there they found the horse and the empty sledge. And the horse was all of a lather of sweat, and its eyes were starting, and it was trembling in every hair.

"God save us! The wolf!" cries Patrick Duncan. "Here is a bad business! Jump in quick, or we may be too late!"

So they both jumped into the sledge, and Patrick Duncan turned the horse about and drove away in a fury. And so they drove furiously down the road and toward the town.

Well, they had gone a little more than half a mile, when, all of a sudden, the

horse stopped stock-still with a jerk that near threw them both out of the sledge. The poor creature stood with all four feet planted, and it snorted and snorted. The evening was then falling pretty fast, and Abijah Butler stood up in the sledge and looked. Then he cried out: "God of Mercy! What is that?" Then he cried out again: "God of Mercy! 'Tis Deacon Graves, and the wolf is at him!" With that he leaped out of the sledge into the snow, and even as he jumped he plucked away the axe from his belt.

By now the horse was leaping and plunging as though it had gone mad and would dash both the sledge and itself to pieces, so that Patrick Duncan had all that he could do to hold it in check.

Abijah Butler ran through the snow as fast as he could to where the wolf was worrying the man in the middle of the road, and he yelled with all his might at the wolf as he ran.

The man lay in the snow and the wolf was worrying him this way and that. The man lay still and did not move, and the wolf worried at him as a wicked dog worries at a sheep. And it was so busy at what it was about that it paid no heed to Abijah Butler or to the plunging horse or to anything else.

It did not appear to be afraid and did not flee away, so that Abijah ran to it and caught it by the hair of its back and tried to drag it away from the man. And he yelled out: "Hell-hound! Let go!" and therewith he struck the beast a fearful blow upon the neck with his axe just where the neck joins the shoulder.

With that the wolf instantly let go the man, and whirled about several times in the road, howling and yelling.



Then it leaped, yelling, over the wall, and ran away in a great circle across the field beyond. And as it ran, Abijah Butler saw it shake its head now and then, and whenever it shook its head he saw that the blood would sprinkle over the snow. Then in a moment or two it stopped yelling and ran very silently—only every now and then it would shake its head and sprinkle more blood upon the snow. So it ran into the woods, and they could not see it any longer.

They lifted up the Deacon and looked at his hurts, for there was still some light, and by it they could see how much harm he had suffered. He was cut and torn in shoulder and neck, and about the ears and head, but he was in a swoon and not dead, for he wore a fur coat, and the collar of the coat had saved him when the wolf worried at him. Old Patrick Duncan stayed by the wounded man, and Abijah Butler ran across the fields to the Buckners' farmhouse. In a little while he came running back with old Simeon Buckner and his two sons. Deacon Graves had not yet come fully out of his swoon, so they lifted him and laid him in the sledge, covering him over with the sheep pelts that were there.

Simeon Buckner and his two sons drove the sledge home very slowly, and Abijah Butler and old Patrick Duncan went on ahead to tell what had happened. Neither said a word to the other, but each looked down at his feet and walked through the snow in silence.

V

As they came near the house they saw that there were lights moving about within. As they kicked the snow off of their feet against the door-step, the door was flung open, and there was Dame Graves standing on the door-sill. "Oh, Abijah Butler!" cries she. "Oh, Patrick Duncan! Come in quick, for Miriam has come back home and is sore hurt!"

Abijah Butler and Patrick Duncan looked at each other. They came into the house. Patrick Duncan took the candle from Dame Graves, and they all went into the room where Miriam lay. She lay in bed with a sheet drawn up to her chin, and the sheet was all stained red with blood.

Patrick Duncan came to the bedside, and caught the sheet and pulled at it. Miriam tried to hold it, but he pulled it out of her hands and down over her shoulders. There was a great, terrible, deep wound in the girl's neck where the neck joins the shoulder, and the bed beneath her was all soaked red with blood.

Patrick Duncan cried out in a loud voice, "Where got you that hurt?"

Miriam said nothing, but only covered her face with both hands.

Patrick Duncan cries out in a still louder and more terrible voice, "Where got you that hurt?"

Upon that she began whimpering and whining just as a great dog would do, and she said, "Alas! I know not how I was hurt!"

Then Patrick Duncan cries out, "In God's name, I bid you tell me how you got that hurt!"

Upon that Miriam screamed out of a sudden very loud, and she cried: "Tortment me not and I will tell you all! I walked in my sleep, I walked out into the barn, and I walked on the haymow, and all the while I was asleep. I slipped from the haymow, and I fell on the scythe blade and cut my neck."

That was what she said, and she had evidence for it; for the next day they found that there was blood in the barn where the scythe hung in the corner under the haymow. But the blood was there because she had put on her shift and petticoat at that place before she went into the house.

They have not hanged any more witches since they pressed old Giles Corey to death. But God knows how such things as this are to be prevented unless the world is rid of such devil's crew.

As for Miriam Graves, her wound festered and she catched a burning fever and died of it on the sixth day after she had been hurt, at three o'clock in the afternoon. But Deacon Graves got well of his hurts.

Abijah Butler went to Providence in Rhode Island, where he joined business with his uncle, Justification Butler; and old Patrick Duncan went to Deerfield to drill a militia company, and was shot by an Indian who had hid in a clearing.

